

Backyard Composting

What is composting?

- Composting is a natural process of biological decomposition of organic materials into a stabile, soil-like material called humus.
- In nature, leaves and branches that fall to the forest floor form a rich, moist layer of mulch that protects the roots of plants and provides a home for nature's recyclers: invertebrates (insects and earthworms), and microorganisms (bacteria and fungi). These natural recyclers feed on the organic matter, turning it into compost. As the mulch decomposes, nutrients essential to plant growth are released into the soil and absorbed through the roots of plants. The new leaves and branches that grow, eventually die and fall to the ground and the cycle continues.
- In your backyard, composting is letting those natural recyclers feast on your yard trimmings, turning them into valuable fertilizer.

Why should I compost?

- **Composting can save you money.** You could save money on garbage collection and recycling fees.
- **Composting turns yard trimmings into resources.** Good compost is expensive to buy, but free for the making. Money does grow on trees with home composting.
- **Composting is convenient.** It's easier to compost yard trimmings than to bag and drag them to the trash can, curb or landfill.
- **Composting benefits soil and plants.** Using compost helps your plants grow healthier and faster by keeping the soil loose and well drained.
- **Composting saves landfill space.** Home composters are one part of the solution in meeting the state's long term disposal needs by reducing the volume of solid waste needing to be landfilled or incinerated.

What should I compost?

The following materials can be composted because their end products are beneficial to the creation of compost soil:

- shredded brush
- grass clippings
- paper
- garden waste
- fireplace ashes (they must be cold or damp)
- leaves
- saw dust (untreated wood)
- vegetables
- fruit
- fruit peels and rinds
- bread
- egg shells.

Note: The size of your compost bin depends on the amount of food produced by your household

What materials should not be composted?

The following organic materials should not be composted because they do not break down, the end products contaminant the compost pile, or they attract pests to the compost pile:

- pet waste
- diseased plants: may contaminate the beneficial microorganisms in the compost pile.
- vegetation treated with pesticides: these should be composted separately and the finished compost should not be used on gardens
- Treated wood
- metal, polystyrene, plastic

- charcoal or coal ashes
- bones
- butter
- cheese
- meat
- milk
- oils

Composting facts

- Yard and food wastes make up approximately 30 percent of the waste stream in the United States. Composting most of these waste streams would reduce the amount of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) requiring disposal by almost one-fourth, while at the same time providing a nutrient rich soil amendment.
- Compost added to the garden improves soil structure, texture, aeration, and water retention.
- When mixed with compost, clay soils are lightened and sandy soils retain water better.
- Mixing compost with soil also contributes to erosion control, soil fertility, proper pH balance, and healthy root development in plants.

Where can I get more information about composting?

- For more information, contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance at (800) 988-7901 or visit our IDEM Web page at <http://www.IN.gov/idem/oppta/recycling/organics/index.html>.